

**Summary of**  
**“The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to**  
**Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity 2001”**  
**By Los Angeles County Public Health Nursing Administration**  
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/>

Overweight and obesity have reached epidemic proportions. In 1999, an estimated 61% of US adults were overweight or obese and 13% of children and adolescents were overweight. About 300,000 deaths each year are associated with overweight and obesity. Left unabated, overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking.

Dealing with this problem is a community responsibility as well as a personal one. Behavioral and environmental factors are large contributors to overweight and obesity and provide the greatest opportunity for actions and interventions designed for prevention and treatment. For the vast majority of individuals, overweight and obesity result from excess calorie consumption and/or inadequate physical activity.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is utilized for defining overweight and obesity. A BMI of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or greater identifies an obese adult and a BMI between 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and 29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup> identifies an overweight adult. In children and adolescents, overweight has been defined as a sex-and age-specific BMI at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile based on revised (2000) CDC growth charts.

There are major health risks (such as premature death, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease) and economic consequences associated with overweight and obesity.

There are disparities in the prevalence of overweight and obesity. These conditions are particularly common among minority groups and those with lower family income.

While the scope of the problem is well documented, there is less clarity about how overweight and obesity can be prevented, what are the most effective prevention and treatment strategies, and how the environment can be modified to promote healthier eating and increased physical activity.

The report presents key actions to address overweight and obesity in the framework of CARE (communication, action, research and evaluation). Actions take place in the context of the following settings: Families and Communities, Schools, Health Care, Media and Communications, and Worksites. Effective action must occur at all levels. While individual behavior change lies at the core of all effective strategies, successful efforts must also focus on group influences, institutional and community influences and public policy. Individual behavior change can only occur in a supportive environment that includes accessible and affordable healthy food choices and opportunities for regular physical activity.

The report ends with a list of 15 activities as national priorities for immediate action that should serve as a roadmap for any community considering taking concerted action related to overweight and obesity.

**At the individual and family level of practice:**

- Change the focus to health not appearance.
- Educate about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Educate health care providers and students in the prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity.
- Reduce time spent watching television and in other sedentary behaviors.
- Promote healthier food choices.
- Build physical activity into the daily routine of adults and children.

**At the community level of practice:**

- Provide culturally appropriate education in schools and communities about healthy eating and regular physical activity for people of all ages with an emphasis on the consumer's role.
- Create more opportunities for physical activity at worksites.

**At the systems level of practice:**

- Make community facilities accessible and available for physical activity for all people.
- Ensure daily, quality physical education in all school grades.
- Ensure schools provide healthful food and beverages on campus and at school events.
- Create mechanisms for reimbursement for the prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity.
- Increase research on the behavioral and environmental causes of overweight and obesity.
- Increase research and evaluation on prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity including best practice guidelines.
- Increase research on the disparities in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among racial and ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and age groups, and use this research to identify effective and culturally appropriate interventions.